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Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 049751

FOLL SENT ACTION HONG KONG INFO SECSTATE RANGOON VIENTIANE
CHIANG MAI FROM BANGKOK 15 MAR 73 REPEATED TO YOU QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 4142

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SNAR, TH, HK
SUBJECT: NARCOTICS: ROLPH VISIT

REF: BANGKOK 3786

1. HK NARCOTICS COMMISSIONER ROLPH PAID A FINAL CALL ON DCM FOLLOWING HIS RETURN TO THAILAND FROM VISITS TO BURMA, LAOS AND NORTHERN THAILAND. ROLPH SAID HE GREATLY APPRECIATED ASSISTANCE RENDERED BY US OFFICIALS IN THE THREE COUNTRIES HE VISITED. HE BELIEVES HE HAS NOW ACQUIRED ADEQUATE PERSPECTIVE WITH WHICH TO DEVELOP PLANS AND PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE ACTION ON HIS RETURN TO HK MARCH 14.

2. DCM ASKED ROLPH IF HE HAD DEVELOPED ANY FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THIS IDEA OF A PREEMPTIVE BUY OF ALL OPIUM GROWN IN THE TRI- BORDER AREA. ROLPH SAID THAT HE HAS APPROACHED THE IDEA OF A PREEMPTIVE BUY WITH A COMPLETELY OPEN MIND, THAT THERE ARE MANY PERMUTATIONS OF A PREEMPTIVE PURCHASE, SOME FORMS OF WHICH MAY BE ACCEPTABLE
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AS AN ANSWER TO THE OPIUM PROBLEM. HE SAID THAT ENFORCEMENT PROGRAMS, EVEN WITH MAXIMUM EFFORT, COULD NOT STOP TRAFFIC AND CROP SUBSTITUTION PROJECTS ARE LIKELY TO TAKE TEN TO TWENTY YEARS FOR THEIR EFFECTS TO BE REALLY FELT; AS A RESULT, SOME OTHER PLAN IS NEEDED TO REMOVE FROM THE ILLICIT MARKET THE GLUT OF OPIUM AND ITS DERIVATIVES COMING DOWN FROM THE HILLS.

3. ROLPH SPECULATED THAT VERY FEW POLITICAL LEADERS WOULD BE SATISFIED TO WAIT TEN TO TWENTY YEARS FOR A PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED THAT REQUIRES URGENT ATTENTION NOW. A PREEMPTIVE BUY, SAID ROLPH, WOULD GIVE EVERYONE THE TIME AND BREATHING SPACE TO WORK ON DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND REPLACEMENT CROPS WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT THE CONTINUED FLOOD OF NARCOTICS ENTERING OUR RESPECTIVE DOMESTIC MARKETS. ROLPH SAID HE WAS TOLD THERE WERE LIMITS ON THE AMOUNT OF OPIUM THAT COULD BE PRODUCED ANNUALLY IN THE HILLS, AND GIVEN THIS MAXIMUM SUPPLY, THE COST FOR ANNUAL PURCHASE OF THE OPIUM WOULD BE WITHIN PRACTICAL REACH OF THOSE COUNTRIES CONCERNED ENOUGH TO WANT TO SPEND THE MONEY. HE LIKENED THE GRADUAL REPLACEMENT OF OPIUM PRODUCTION THROUGH SUBSIDIZATION TO THE TURKEY PROGRAM FINANCED BY THE U. S. DCM SAID PREEMPTIVE PURCHASE ARRANGEMENTS RAISED ANUMBER OF QUESTIONS CONCERNING PHYSICAL LIMITS ON PRODUCTION OF OPIUM POPPIES BY HILLTRIBES, ATTITUDES OF GOVERNMENTS IN THRE AREA, RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
OPIUM PRODUCTION AND DISSIDENT MOVEMENTS IN BURMA, ETC. HOWEVER, IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO STUDY, DISPASSIONATELY AND THOROUGHLY, THE PROS AND CONS AND PRACTICAL EFFECT OF A PREEMPTIVE BUY OR SIMILAR ACTION.

4. DCM THEN RAISED A POINT THAT ROLPH HAD MENTIONED IN EARLIER MEETING (REFTEL) ON POSTING A UK OR HK LIAISON OFFICER AT THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN BANGKOK. ROLPH SAID THIS WAS STILL BEING DISCUSSED. DCM SAID HE DID NOT WISH TO BECOME INVOLVED IN WHAT IS STRICTLY A BRITISH GOVERNMENT DECISION ON THE MATTER, BUT WE BELIEVE SUCH ACTION WOULD BE MOST USEFUL AND, IF AN OFFICER IS POSTED, THE US EMBASSY WOLD GIVE HIM COMPLETE COOPERATION ON THE WHOLE RANGE OF NARCOTICS MATTERS.

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5. IN RESPONSE TO DCM' S QUERY, ROLPH SAID THAT HE STILL

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BELIEVES CORRUPTION AT HIGH LEVELS PLAYS AN IMPORTANT
PART IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING IN THAILAND. DCM IN RESPONSE SAID
THAT WHILE WE HAVE HADNO INDICATION OF CORRUPTION RELATED
TO NARCOTICS AT THE POLICY MAKING AND CABINET LEVEL OF THE
THAI GOVERNMENT, CORRUPTION DOES EXIST HERE AS ELSEWHERE AT
LOWER LEVELS AND THE RTG IS MAKING SOME EFFORT TO ROOT IT OUT--
THE CASE IN POINT BEING THE PROSECUTION OF POLICE COLONEL
PRAMUAN, FORMERLY OF THE NARCOTICS POLICE, FOR EXTORTION.

6. ROLPH SAID THE OVERWHELMING PROBLEM OF THAI TRAWLERS
CARRYING NARCOTICS WAS STILL MUCH ON HIS MIND, AND THAT
HE HAD NOT COME UP WITH A WORKABLE SOLUTION. ONE THING
THAT MIGHT BE TRIED, HE SUGGESTED, IS A COASTAL WATCH
SIMILAR TO THAT USED ON THE COAST OF ENGLAND DURING WWII,
TO SPOT THE ONLOADING OF SUSPICIOUS CARGO ALONG THE THAI
COASTLINE. HE WAS NOT SANGUINE ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR
STOPPING THE TRAWLER TRAFFIC, BUT WAS ASSURED BY DCM
THAT USG IS GIVING THIS HIGH PRIORITY. ROLPH RESPONDED
POSITIVELY TO DCM' S SUGGESTION THAT KEY THAI POLICE OF-
FICIALS BE INVITED TO HONG KONG FOR FULL AND FRANK DIS-
CUSSION OF PROBLEM AND TO IMPROVE COORDINATION ON TWO
ENDS OF TRAWLER CONNECTION.

7. BELIEVE ROLPH VISIT WAS USEFUL IN GIVING HIM APPRE-
CIATION OF POLITICAL, GEOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS
WE FACE IN APPROACHING PROBLEM HERE. WOULD APPRECIATE
ANY FEEDBACK FROM HONG KONG.
UNGER UNQUOTE ROGERS

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